



UTAH DEPARTMENT OF
HEALTH



News Release

For Immediate Release:

Wednesday May 4, 2011

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Health Officials Warn of Drowning Dangers

Toddlers, teens at greatest risk

(Salt Lake City, UT) – An above average snowpack, wet spring, and warming temperatures have health officials worried about the risk of drowning as flooding concerns continue to increase.

“We are urging the public to be extremely careful around any open bodies of water right now. With the spring runoff, water is moving fast and cold and the risk of drowning is just too great, especially for children,” said Jenny Johnson, spokesperson for the Utah Department of Health (UDOH) Violence and Injury Prevention Program.

Drowning is one of the leading causes of injury-related death for children under 18 in Utah. Since 2008, 24 Utah children 18 years of age and younger have drowned. UDOH data show there are several age distinct patterns among Utah child drowning deaths:

- **Toddlers (ages 1-4) wandering off.** The most common scenario involves an under-supervised child wandering off during a weekend family gathering – with several adults present but none designated as the official “child watcher” – and falling into a body of water (like a pool, stream, pond, creek, or irrigation ditch). In some cases, the child was thought to be indoors but had managed to get out of the house undetected.
- **Teens (frequently males) swimming with friends at a reservoir or lake.** Many of these deaths are “witnessed” drownings, where friends or family members see the victim go under the water and are unable to rescue them. Overestimating swimming abilities and peer pressure to take risks are thought to be factors in these deaths.
- **Infants left unattended in bathtubs.** These drownings also include cases where an infant was left alone in a bathtub with an older brother or sister.

“Water is dangerous at any depth,” said Janet Brooks, Child Advocacy Manager at Primary Children's Medical Center. “It takes just seconds for a child to drown. Never take your

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eyes off your children when they're around water and remember, don't just be there, be aware.”

To prevent drownings, follow these 10 safety tips:

- Never leave a child alone around any water, even for a few minutes. This includes never leaving a child or infant alone in a bathtub with an older brother or sister.
- Actively supervise children who are playing in or near water. Stay alert and avoid distractions.
- Where there's water, designate an adult “child watcher” during parties and family gatherings.
- Warn teenagers of the risks of overestimating how well they swim. Even experienced swimmers can drown.
- Have everyone wear a Coast Guard-approved life jacket while on a boat or during water sports. Children should also wear a life jacket when near open bodies of water.
- Install a carbon monoxide detector aboard houseboats.
- Never dive into unknown or shallow waters.
- Enclose pools and hot tubs with self-closing and locking gates/fences.
- Empty buckets and wading pools after use.
- Learn infant and child CPR.

For more water safety tips, visit www.safekidsutah.org/safety-tips/water-safety. To watch videos from the “Water: Danger at any Depth” drowning prevention campaign, visit www.youtube.com/user/PrimaryChildrens and search “water danger.”

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